



Pick Your Path to Health

When Keeping a Healthy Weight is More Complicated

Arla Perry is an excellent cook and bakes cakes and pies that would make even the best pastry chefs envious. But she never eats her own creations. She has diabetes. She also has hepatitis C. Losing weight can help her manage her diabetes and may lessen the side effects of the medication she uses for hepatitis, but it's not easy.

Working Around Complicating Factors

African-American women tend to develop more complications and are at risk for more illnesses related to being overweight. But they can overcome these odds by maintaining a healthy weight.

So what is a healthy weight? Most of us grew up with the doctor's height and weight charts that said if you're, for example, 5 feet, 3 inches, your ideal weight is 115 pounds. But you know you look good and you feel great! You ask, "But doctor, I weigh 130 pounds and I can wear a size 7, I feel good, isn't this weight healthy?" The answer is-"Yes, it certainly can be."

The old height/weight charts are still used. However, according to Dr. JudyAnn Bigby, Medical Director, Office for Women, Family and Community Programs, Brigham & Women's Hospital in Boston, "What is a healthy weight is a complicated issue. We look at a few things-a person's bone structure, if she is having physical or medical problems from her weight, and does she feel good about herself. The best way to determine if you're at a healthy weight is by getting a measure of your Body Mass Index (BMI)."

To figure out your BMI, multiply your weight in pounds by 703 and then divide your answer by your height in inches multiplied by your height in inches. You can also get your BMI calculated for you at www.nhlbisupport.com/bmi/. According to Dr. Bigby, if the BMI is over 27, you are considered overweight and at higher risk of developing related complications. If it is lower than 27, you are at a lower risk for developing complications.

When maintaining a healthy weight is complicated by other issues, working with your health care provider can help you manage the complications.

Here are some common barriers to maintaining a healthy weight and some possible solutions:

Barriers	Solutions
Arthritis and other limited mobility	-Do lighter exercise, use a treadmill-Use stretch bands, do chair stretches-Work with a physical therapist
Medications (fluid retention/weight gain)	-See your physician for suggestions to counter the side effects if possible- Adjust calorie intake
Hectic lifestyle	Find 10 minutes here and there for yourself-it all adds up- Prepare food ahead of time for convenience (cook a large portion, bag it and freeze it and store for later)
Limited budget/access to healthy food	-Prepare food ahead of time, cook large batch and freeze for later- Avoid vending machines; take snacks with you-Canned vegetables and fruit are healthy
Other medical conditions (asthma, high blood pressure)	-Always seek medical advice when starting weight loss program to tailor it to your specific needs-No strenuous exercise

Arla is on a weight loss program that is carefully supervised and specifically geared to her medical conditions. She has lost weight and is achieving her goal of getting more fit before her next treatment phase. Despite all health complications, she is succeeding. "I feel better than I've ever felt before. It works...I have more energy, she says."

Arla is well on her path to better health. Why not follow her example? No matter what your situation, you can pick your own path to better health.

For more information, try these resources:

- Hepatitis Central, www.hepatitis-central.com.
- American Diabetes Association: The African American Program Internet Address: www.diabetes.org/africanamerican/ 1-800-DIABETES (1-800-342-2383).
- National Women's Health Information Center, Office of Women's Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources, www.4woman.gov, 1-800-994-WOMAN

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, www.cdc.gov/nchs, (301) 458-4636.

Pick Your Path to Health is a national public health campaign sponsored by the Office on Women's Health within the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. For more information about the campaign, call 1-800-994-WOMAN or TDD at 1-888-220-5446 or visit the National Women's Health Information Center at www.4woman.gov. To request weekly health tips by e-mail visit www.4woman.gov and follow the appropriate link.